



Skiing and Snowshoeing

Before Your Trip

Enjoy Glacier’s winter landscape on one of the following ski trips. Take into account your skiing ability, and check with rangers for local weather and snow conditions. Severe weather, lack of snow, winter rains, or melting conditions can quickly alter the difficulty of any winter trip. Ice is common on roads and on heavily skied trails. Plan to break trail on less popular routes. The Middle and North Forks of the Flathead River present major barriers to travel on the west side of the park. Skiing on frozen lakes is dangerous and not recommended. Skiers, snowshoers, and hikers are asked to maintain separate tracks.

As winter snows start to melt, emerging vegetation is revealed. Please stay off these fragile areas. Spring skiing opportunities remain at Granite Park, Many Glacier, and Logan Pass, but remember, warming conditions greatly increase avalanche activity.

Most ski routes are not marked. Pay attention to descriptions and local landmarks. A topographic map will help.

Arduous cross park trips contain extreme avalanche and terrain hazards and should be attempted only by experienced and well-equipped parties.

A permit is required for backcountry camping. Practice “Leave No Trace” camping techniques described in the information provided with your permit.

Skiers and snowshoers please register at the trailhead registration boxes. Climbers should complete the *Voluntary Climber’s Registration* form, available at ranger stations, Park Headquarters, and the Apgar Visitor Center.

Pets are not allowed on trails, unplowed roads, in the backcountry, or off leash. Snowmobiles are not permitted anywhere in Glacier National Park.

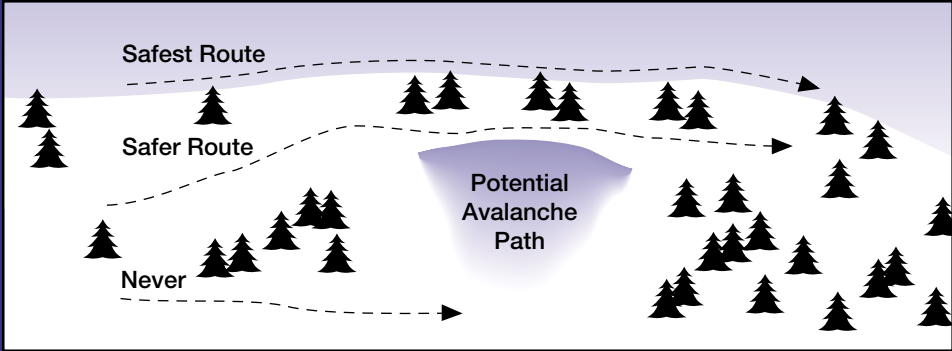
Avalanches

Avalanches are a major danger and potential killer. An understanding of avalanche conditions is the skier’s best defense. Watch for signs of previous activity like old avalanche paths, downed trees, recent slides, and clumps of snow. Choose the safest route. Stay off cornices and steep-to-moderate, open slopes. Stay out of gullies. If you must travel on a dangerous slope, go straight up or down; never back and forth.

The Northwest Montana Avalanche Warning System provides a weekly assessment of avalanche conditions. Forecasts are updated each Friday morning, and broadcast by local radio stations. Information can also be obtained by calling 406-257-8402 or 1-800-526-5329.

About 80% of avalanches occur during and immediately after storms. Avalanche activity increases with a foot or more of

new snow, snowfall of one inch or more per hour, sustained winds over 15 miles per hour, changing temperatures, and during spring warming. Learn to recognize dangerous weather conditions. Carry rescue equipment including rescue shovels, ski probe poles, and transceivers. If you must cross a steep slope, cross one at a time, loosen pack straps, remove ski pole straps, fasten all layers of clothing, and put on a hat and gloves.



If caught in an avalanche, discard all equipment and make swimming motions toward the surface. As the sole survivor, do not go for help unless it is only a few minutes away. After 30 minutes, the buried victim has only a 50% chance of surviving. Mark the place where the victim was last seen, search directly downslope for clues, and begin to probe immediately at the most likely location. Use probes, ski poles, skis, or anything available. With more than one survivor, send for help while the rest search.

Wildlife

Wildlife viewing remains very rewarding in winter. Remember, survival during the long winter is difficult for Glacier’s wildlife. Human contact adds unnecessary stress. Avoid approaching or startling any animals or birds. All park animals are wild and should never be fed. Bears, asleep for most of the winter, sometimes awaken for short periods of time. As always in bear country, exercise extreme caution, especially with food and garbage. If approached by a mountain lion, act aggressively. Do not run! Lions may be scared away by being struck with rocks or sticks, or by being kicked or hit.

Hypothermia

Winter backcountry travel increases the risk of hypothermia and frostbite. Hypothermia, the “progressive physical collapse and reduced mental capacity resulting from the chilling of the inner core of the body,” is the primary killer of outdoor enthusiasts. Drink liquids, stay dry, carry survival gear, wear layers of clothing, and snack frequently. Be alert to symptoms of drowsiness and confusion. Once hypothermia sets in, external sources of warmth are necessary to revive the victim. Frostbite can occur on the ears, fingers, toes, face, or any exposed skin.

Information/Emergency

Glacier National Park
P. O. Box 128, West Glacier, MT 59936
<http://www.nps.gov/glac/home.htm>

- **After hours emergency 911**
- Park Headquarters 406-888-7800
- Apgar Visitor Center 406-888-7939
- Open winter weekends
- Hudson Bay Dist. Office 406-732-7700
- 406-732-7730
- 406-732-7733
- 406-732-7737
- Polebridge R. S. 406-888-7842
- East Glacier R. S. 406-226-4473
- Avalanche Information .. 1-800-526-5329

Upper Lake McDonald

Gentle terrain, generally ample snow, and easy access to wonderful winter scenery make this the most popular skiing area in the park. From West Glacier, follow the Going-to-the-Sun Road for eight miles along Lake McDonald, to Lake McDonald Lodge, where the winter road closure and parking area are located.

McDonald Falls 4 miles round trip

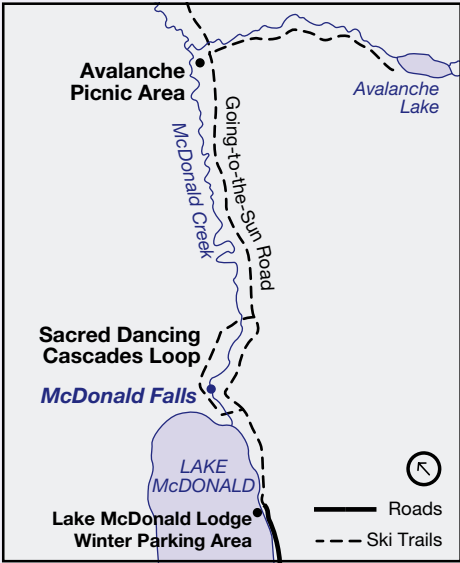
Ski up the unplowed road 1.8 miles. Turn left and ski a short distance to the bridge over McDonald Creek for a view of McDonald Falls.

Sacred Dancing Cascade 5.3 miles round trip

Follow the route to McDonald Falls. Just across the bridge, turn right. Ski upstream one mile along the west bank of McDonald Creek. Cross the foot bridge over the creek. Turn right and follow the unplowed road back to Lake McDonald Lodge.

Avalanche Picnic Area 11.6 miles round trip

The route up the Going-to-the-Sun Road offers easy skiing and good views of McDonald Creek and the mountains surrounding the McDonald Valley. Avalanche Picnic Area is a good destination. Longer trips up the road are possible. The forested valley trails, especially along Sacred Dancing Cascade, are also popular. Snow conditions may be variable under the trees. Avalanche Lake is a popular destination with some steep narrow sections that can be difficult to ski up or down, especially when icy. The Trail of the Cedars is generally not good skiing.



Polebridge

The routes described follow the unplowed gravel roads originating at the Polebridge Ranger Station. Access to the area is via county road 486, running north from Columbia Falls to the Canadian boundary. This road is infrequently plowed and skiers should check on local road conditions. Park on the east side of the North Fork Bridge at Polebridge Ranger Station.

Big Prairie 4 miles round trip

Ski this mostly level route from the ranger station through the 1988 burn to a large natural meadow and return. Keep left at both road junctions. Highlights include views of the North Fork of the Flathead River, the Whitefish Range to the west, and the Livingston Range to the east.

Bowman Lake 12 miles round trip

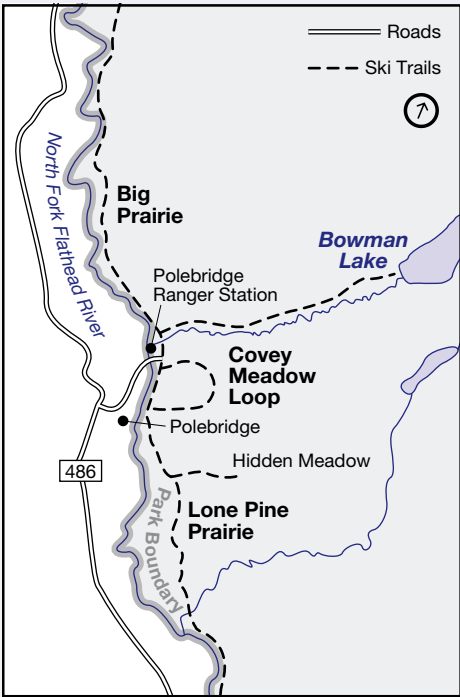
After leaving the ranger station go left at the first junction, then right at the second. Several hills on this route may be difficult when icy. The reduced forest canopy left by the 1988 burn provides excellent views of the mountains. The route continues through the forest to a spectacular view at the foot of Bowman Lake.

Covey Meadow Loop 3 miles round trip

After leaving the Polebridge Ranger Station go right at the gate for approximately 100 yards, then turn left into the natural meadow. The route circles around to intersect with the Lone Pine Prairie trail at a high bank overlooking the North Fork of the Flathead. This trip offers an excellent outing for families with small children.

Lone Pine Prairie 6 miles round trip

Ski right, at the first road junction north of the ranger station, over low hills to a natural meadow. This route affords views of the river, the mountains, and the 1988 burn. An easy trail leaves from the eastern edge of Lone Pine Prairie to Hidden Meadow (2.4 miles round trip).





Apgar - West Glacier

The routes described in this area begin at two parking locations:

- 1 the concession horse barn, reached by taking the first left off the Going-to-the-Sun Road, past the West Entrance Station, and
- 2 the road closure gate just beyond the McDonald Creek Bridge on the Camas Road. Check the map insert for details.

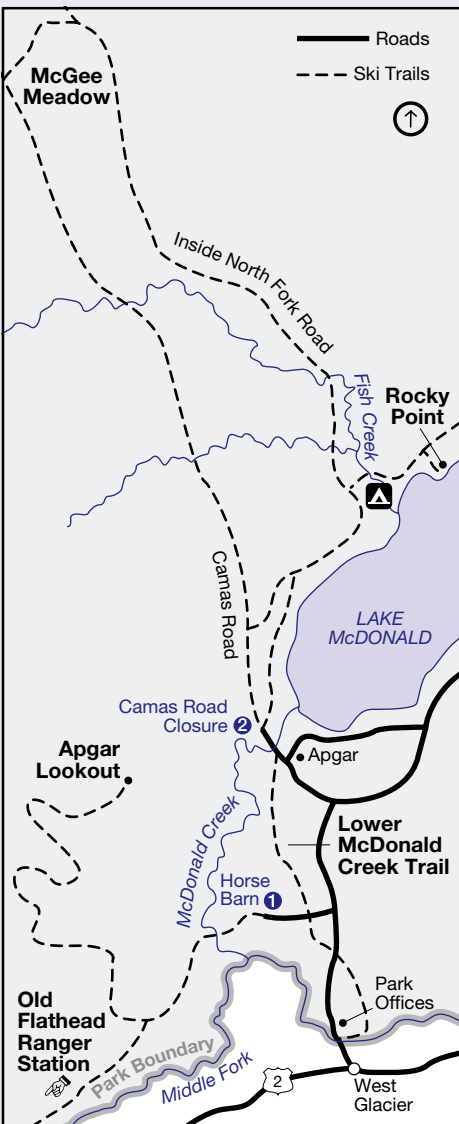
Lower McDonald Creek 2
2 to 3 miles round trip
The trail begins just south of the McDonald Creek Bridge. The best access is the summer bike/foot path. This entire area is a good place to explore on your own. The gentle terrain along lower McDonald Creek provides easy skiing through the forest with side trips along the creek.

Rocky Point 2
6 miles round trip
Follow the same route as McGee Meadow Loop (described at right) until .2 miles north of the Fish Creek Campground. Take the McDonald Lake Trail on the right, just before the gate on the road. The trail winds down a short hill but the route is fairly level for the most part. Ski left at the first trail junction then right at the next one shortly thereafter. The forest opens as you approach Rocky Point, where there are beautiful views up and down Lake McDonald.

Apgar Lookout 1
10.5 miles round trip
Park at the plowed area in front of the barn and follow the left fork of the unplowed road across the Quarter Circle Bridge. Take the right fork and follow the road .5 mile until the actual Apgar Lookout trailhead is reached. After an easy start the trail steepens and climbing skins may be necessary for the trip if conditions are icy. The views are great from the lookout but this trail may be very difficult for beginning skiers.

Old Flathead Ranger Station 1
10 miles round trip
Park in front of the barn and follow the left fork of the unplowed road to the Quarter Circle Bridge (.5 mile). The trail provides good views of the McDonald Valley, and the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, before entering the forest. Take the left fork at the road junction 1 mile from the bridge. An exceptional view of the river is located 2.5 miles from the junction, 100 feet south of the road, across from an open hillside. One building of the old station still stands on the bluff above the confluence of the North and Middle Forks of the Flathead River.

McGee Meadow Loop 2
11.5 miles round trip
Take the right fork of the road at the closure and ski past the houses until the road turns to a trail. The trail soon joins the road to Fish Creek Campground and the Inside North Fork Road. Bear left past the campground. The improved road soon turns to a narrow climbing gravel road. From this point it is 3 miles to the first meadow. Continue over the crest of the hill to an orange marker identifying the trail to McGee Meadow. Ski along the northern edge of the meadow until you see the opening for the car pullout to the west, on the Camas Road. After a couple of short uphill sections, the route descends to the road closure. This trip can be done in either direction, but going up the Camas Road is more strenuous.



Marias Pass

The area surrounding the summit of Marias Pass, locally called “Summit”, is a popular winter recreation spot for skiers and snowmobilers alike. The conditions may occasionally be very windy, but the snow can still be good here when other areas are not. Parking at the main lot by the monument is usually best although other areas may be blown or plowed free of snow.

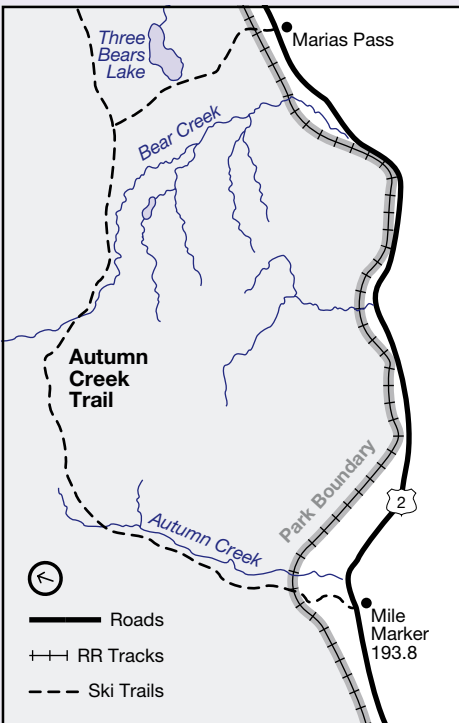
Autumn Creek Trail
6 miles
Autumn Creek is the most popular ski route in this area. The trail starts right at the summit of Marias Pass and crosses the railroad tracks before entering the park. Use caution when crossing this main line; removing skis is a good idea.

Look for the orange markers as you enter the trees as they will mark the trail’s location. Turn left at the first trail junction. The first section of the route follows the gradual grade of the trail until you reach the open section below Elk Mountain. The views of the mountains from this opening are spectacular but several avalanche paths cross this area and openings to the south.

If you get off trail, or have to detour past areas blown free of snow, ski to the obvious

drainage of Autumn Creek to the west. Here the route follows the right side of the creek. From the start of the creek drainage there are some steep hills and creek crossings which merit caution, especially in icy conditions. The route follows the trail to the railroad tracks again and then follows the steep access road to a pulloff at mile marker 193.8 on U.S. Highway 2.

Beginners may want to just ski the first part of this trail and explore the open areas along the beginning of the trail, especially the Three Bears Lake area.



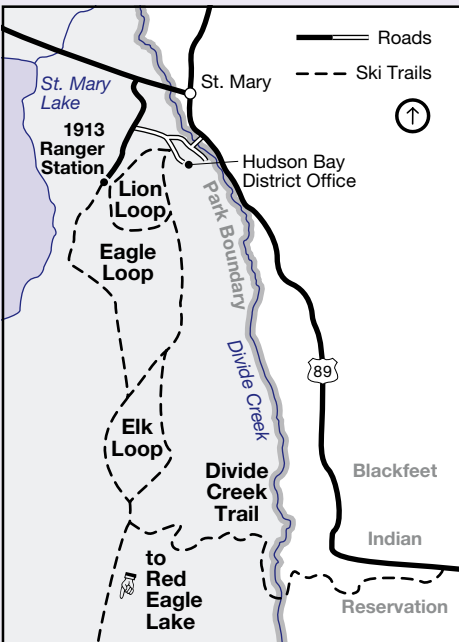
St. Mary

The main trailhead for these trails is the parking area near the 1913 Ranger Station. Take U.S. Highway 89 to the town of St. Mary. After entering the park, follow the signs to the 1913 Ranger Station. Winter backcountry camping permits may be obtained at the Hudson Bay District Office. Call ahead to ensure staff will be available to issue permits.

Red Eagle Loops
Mileage varies
These specially designated and marked loops offer fine skiing through the aspen, meadows, and mixed conifer stands in the rolling hills east of St. Mary Lake. The distances are one mile for the Lion Loop, 2.5 miles for the Eagle Loop, and 3.5 miles for the Elk Loop.

Red Eagle Lake Trail
8 miles round trip
Follow the first part of the Eagle and Elk Loops to the old fire road, now called the Red Eagle Lake Trail, and ski the rolling terrain to the scenic bluff overlooking Red Eagle Creek. There are great views of the mountains along St. Mary Lake and the Red Eagle Valley.

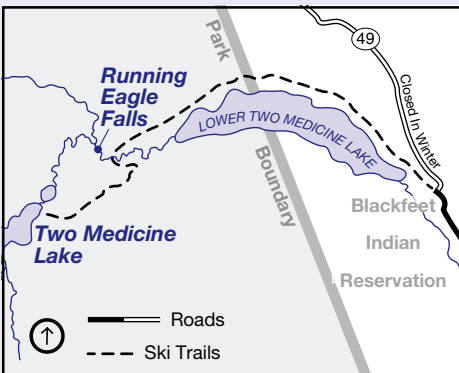
Divide Creek Trail
7 miles
The Blackfeet Tribe requires a permit, obtainable at the tribal Fish & Game office in Browning, to ski on the reservation.
This trail is much easier to ski downhill from the highway on Hudson Bay Divide to the Hudson Bay District Office trailhead. Start at an orange stake on Highway 89, 4.5 miles south of St. Mary. Begin on the logging access road which skirts the bottom edge of several clear-cuts, then descends to Divide Creek. Use caution when crossing the creek and climbing out along the steep, narrow hillside. The route then follows the old highway route to the Red Eagle Trail and back to the trailhead via one of the loop accesses. This route is recommended for intermediate to advanced skiers.



Two Medicine Valley

The Two Medicine Road provides easy access to scenic skiing when snow conditions are good. On the east side of Glacier National Park snow deposition is strongly influenced by wind. Open areas may be blown free of snow any time of the winter.

Two Medicine Road
Mileage varies
Start skiing at the end of the plowed road (usually 4 miles north of East Glacier) near the junction of Highway 49 and the Two Medicine Road. Popular destinations include: the park boundary, 6 miles round trip; Running Eagle Falls, 10 miles round trip; and Two Medicine Lake, a strenuous and hilly 16 mile round trip.



Mt. Wilbur



Skiing through the aspen, below Dancing Lady Mountain